

Message Text

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ACTION AF-08

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 /054 W
-----190656Z 110113 /13
R 181420Z MAR 77
FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6036
INFO AMEMBASSY KIGALI

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0282

E.O.: 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MILL, BY
SUBJ: APPOINTMENT OF NEW CHIEF OF STAFF

1. ON MARCH 16, PRESIDENT BAGAZA APPINTED COMMANDANT ANTOINE NIYUNGEKO TO BE CHIEF OF THE GENERAL STAFF. NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT THE FATE OF THE PREVIOUS CHIEF, COLONEL SYLVERE NZOHABONAYO, APPONTED DECEMBER 30, 1976, THOUGH ONE SOURCE SAYS HE WILL RETAIN HIS SECOND JOB AS SURETE CHIEF. OUR RECORDS ARE ALMOST BLANK ON NIYUNGEKO, EXCEPT THAT HE IS THE ONLY OFFICER OF HIS RELATIVELY JUNIOR RANK (JUST BELOR MAJOR) TO HAVE A SEAT ON THE IMPORTANT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE SUPREME REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (OF THE ARMED FORCES).

2. THE DESIGNATION OF A COMMANDANT AS CHIEF OF STAFF OVER THE HEADS OF A NUMBER OF LIEUTENANT COLONELS AND MAJORS IS HIGHLY IRREGULAR, AND THERE MUST BE MUCH MORE BEHIND IT THAN MEETS THE EYE, THE QUESTION IS WHAT, AND IF THE ANSWER WERE KNOWN, IT MIGHT TELL US A GOOD DEAL ABOUT THE BASIC INTERNAL TRENDS AND EVEN PERHAPS FOREIGN POLICY ORIENTATION OF THE BAGAZA REGIME, IN WHICH THE MILITARY REMAINS THE ULTIMATE ARBITER OF POWER.

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3. NZOHABONAYO, THE ONLY OTHER COLONEL BESIDES BAGAZA IN THE ARMY, IS SUPPOSED TO HAVE PLAYED A KEY ROLE IN THE NOVEMBER ONE COUP D'ETAT, ALONG WITH BAGAZA AND LIEUTENANT COLONEL NZAMBIMANA, NOW THE PRIME MINISTER. NZOHABONAYO WAS SUPPOSED NOT TO HAVE BEEN ANXIOUS TO LEAVE HIS TROOP COMMAND TO TAKE THE CHIEF OF STAFF JOB LAST DECEMBER, BUT DID SO, AS AN ALLY OF BAGAZA, TO FORESTALL PRESSURE

FOR APPOINTMENT OF MAJOR JEROME SINDUHIJE, AN ALLY OF THE PRIME MINISTER AND OF ARTEMON SIMBANANIYE (NOW BURUNDI AMBASSADOR TO THE UN), WHO TOGETHER SPARK THE STRONG "MATANA" POLITICAL FACTION THAT CONTINUES ITS RIVALRY WITH BAGAZA.

4. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NZOHABONAYO AND BAGAZA HAVE NOW HIT ON AN ARRANGEMENT WHICH LETS THE FORMER RETURN TO A MAJOR TROOP COMMAND, WHILE GETTING A NEW CHIEF OF STAFF WHO SEES EYE TO EYE WITH THE TWO COLONELS. BUT WE DO NOT RPT NOT KNOW THIS TO BE THE CASE, SINCE WE DO NOT KNOW THE POLITICAL FACTIONAL INCLINATIONS OF NIYUNGEKO, NOR AT WHOSE INITIATIVE THE LATEST TURNOVER HAS OCCURRED.

5. DURING MY MEETING WITH BAGAZA MARCH 17, I NOTED THE NEW APPOINTMENT IN PASSING AND COMMENTED ON THE NEW CHIEF'S JUNIOR RANK. THIS OCCASIONED A BIT OF NERVOUS LAUGHTER FROM BAGAZA, BUT HE OFFERED NO EXPLANATION. IN GENERAL, HE SEEMED SURE OF HIS OWN POSITION THROUGHOUT THE MEETING IN EXPATIATING ON REGIME PROGRAMS AND POLICES, BUT, THEN AGAIN, EVEN IF HE FELT SOME UNEASE ABOUT MILITARY COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS, THAT WOULD PROBABLY NOT RPT NOT SHOW UP IN THE CONTEXT OF DISCUSSION WITH A FOREIGN AMBASSADOR.

6. ONE MIGHT SPECULATE THAT THE YOUNGER OFFICERS HAVE FORMED SOME SORT OF CABAL OF THEIR OWN, HAVE BECOME AN UNSEEN POWER IN FORMULATING BOTH MILITARY AND NATIONAL POLICY, AND HAVE THUS PUT OVER THEIR OWN CANDIDATE AS CHIEF OF STAFF. THE TROUBLE WITH THIS LINE IS THAT THE CONFIDENTIAL

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JUNIOR OFFICERS WERE GIVEN VERY LITTLE REPRESENTATION AFTER NOVEMBER ONE ON THE SUPREME COUNCIL AND WERE NOT THOUGHT TO HAVE PLAYED A LEADING ROLE IN ORGANIZING THE COUP D'ETAT. AN ALTERNATIVE IDEA IS THAT BAGAZA, FEELING PRESSURE FROM THE "MATANA" GROUP AND THE PRIME MINISTER (WHICH MANY FOREIGN OBSERVERS THINK TO BE THE CASE) HAS DIPPED INTO THE JUNIOR RANKS TO BOLSTER HIS OWN POSITION. INDEED, BAGAZA, THOUGH A COLONEL, IS REALLY ONLY OF THE AGE AND OF THE YEAR GROUP OF A JUNIOR OFFICER, SINCE HIS RAPID PROMOTIONS WERE DUE TO MICOMBERO'S DIRECT ORDERS. THUS, BAGAZA MAY HAVE MANY LINKS TO YOUNGER OFFICERS WHICH HE MAY NOW FEEL THE NEED TO EXPLOIT.

7. WE ARE TRYING TO TOUCH BASE WITH ALL POTENTIALLY KNOWLEDGEABLE SOURCES ON THIS DEVELOPMENT TO SEE WHAT IT MAY PORTEND FOR INTERNAL POWER STRUGGLES HERE.
MARK

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: MILITARY PERSONNEL, PERSONNEL ASSIGNMENTS, INTELLIGENCE ASSESSMENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Sent Date: 18-Mar-1977 12:00:00 am
Decaption Date: 01-Jan-1960 12:00:00 am
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977BUJUMB00282
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770094-0667
Format: TEL
From: BUJUMBURA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770347/aaaaboia.tel
Line Count: 114
Litigation Code IDs:
Litigation Codes:
Litigation History:
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Message ID: 3c12eeb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 22-Dec-2004 12:00:00 am
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 3070458
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: APPOINTMENT OF NEW CHIEF OF STAFF
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, MILI, BY, (NIYUNGEKO, ANTOINE)
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/3c12eeb5-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009